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RESOLUTIONS, &c.

OF
H. London.—

THE SOCIETY of the Friends of the
People,

ASSOCIATED FOR THE PURPOSE OF OBTAINING

A PARLIAMENTARY REFORM.

Held at the FREEMASON'S TAVERN, on SATURDAY, MAY 12, 1792.

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AT A MEETING OF THE SOCIETY OF

THE FRIENDS OF THE PEOPLE,

ASSOCIATED FOR THE PURPOSE OF OBTAINING

A PARLIAMENTARY REFORM,

Held at the FREEMASON'S TAVERN, on SATURDAY MAY 12, 1792,

Right Hon. Lord JOHN RUSSELL, M. P. Chairman.

GEORGE BYNG, Esq. M. P. Deputy Chairman.

THE following Letter, received at the last Meeting, from the Society for Constitutional Information, and then ordered to be reported upon by the Committee, was again read,

“ SIR,

“ By the Society for Constitutional Information, I am commanded to express
“ to you the satisfaction that its Members feel on the institution of your Society.

“ That the House of Commons itself, which is the very subject to be reformed,
“ should have furnished a part of the strength of this new Institution, may ultimately afford important advantages to the public. But it must not, Sir, be disguised, that at first this circumstance will necessarily be accompanied with doubts, with suspicions, with apprehensions. It is not, Sir, the first time that Members of that House have professed themselves Reformers. It is not the first time that they have entered into popular Associations; but, should they on this occasion prove faithfully instrumental in effecting a substantial Reform in the

“Representation of the People, and the duration of Parliaments, it will be the
 “first time that the Nation hath not found itself in an error, when it placed con-
 “fidence in associated Members of Parliament, for the recovery of the Constitu-
 “tional and inestimable Rights of the People. The long lost Rights of Repre-
 “sentation are rights, Sir, which, in truth, are not to be recovered but by the
 “exertions and unanimity of the People themselves. Impressed with this great
 “truth, it has been an invariable object of this Society ‘to revive in the minds of the
 “Commonalty at large a knowledge of their lost Rights, respecting the Election and dura-
 “tion of the Representative Body;’ and we doubt not that your Society will see the
 “wisdom of pursuing a like course. May it taste the delight of diffusing this
 “knowledge! May it reap the honour of calling forth the energies of the
 “Nation!

“When this Society, Sir, contemplates that flood of light and truth, which,
 “under a benign Providence, is now sweeping from the earth despotism in all its
 “forms, and infringements of rights in all its degrees; to make way for freedom,
 “justice, peace, and human happiness; and when it sees your Society announce
 “itself to the world, as the Friends of the People, it rests assured, that this new
 “Institution abundantly partakes of that light, that it embraces that truth, and
 “that it will act up to the sacredness of that friendship which it professes, by
 “nobly casting from it with disdain all aristocratic reserves, and fairly and honestly
 “contending for the People’s Rights in their full extent. Here, Sir, be assured,
 “lies all your strength. You may boast of names, of wealth, of talents, and
 “even of principles, but without the fellowship of the people, *understanding*
 “and feeling their immediate interest in the contest, your Association, whenever it
 “grapples with that powerful despotism to which it is opposed, and to which a
 “constitutional cloak serves as shield and armour, will most assuredly crumble to
 “dust.

“Here, Sir, it is with peculiar satisfaction, that the Society for Constitutional
 “Information can express its belief, that to its own unequivocal ‘*Declaration of*
 “*Rights, without which no Englishman can be a Freeman, nor the English Nation a free*
 “*People*,’ it owes that confidence on the part of all true friends to a substantial
 “Reform of Parliament, which in all periods of the Society’s existence, it has in-
 “variably experienced. This short declaration, containing no more than four
 “distinct

“ distinct propositions, satisfied the people that the Society assumed not the Office
 “ of Reformer, without knowing with precision what wanted reform ; nor the cha-
 “ racter of friend, without manifesting that sincerity which gave proof of its at-
 “ tachment. It left to such Reformers as Mr. Burke to talk of the people's li-
 “ berties ; and at the same time to deny, or explain away their rights.

“ This, Society, Sir, trusts that the purity of principle, which actuated indi-
 “ vidual Members of Parliament, who joined the Associations that have been
 “ spoken of, will in no degree be affected by the observations that have been
 “ made upon the inefficiency of those Associations ; but convinced that a strong
 “ impression still remains upon the minds of the people, that in general, persons
 “ who have long been accustomed to hold seats in the House of Commons under
 “ the present abuses in the representation, and whose connections are all Aristo-
 “ cratic, must be almost more than men, at once, and completely, to sacrifice
 “ both prejudice and unwarranted power at the Altar of Freedom. This Society,
 “ convinced, I say, Sir, of the existence of this impression, would not suffer its
 “ delicacy to stand in the way of its duty on this important occasion ; but deter-
 “ mined, with the frankness belonging to sincere affection, to warn its new bre-
 “ thren against a danger, to which they might otherwise become exposed through
 “ mere inadvertency.

“ That the distinguished persons who have adorned the Senate, and now adorn
 “ your Society, may be found equal to the sublime effort of virtue which their
 “ situation now demands ; and may on that account receive the blessings of their
 “ country and of mankind to the latest posterity, is the sincere, the ardent wish
 “ of the Society for Constitutional Information, in whose name I have the honour
 “ to subscribe myself, with great regard,

S I R,

“ Your most obedient, humble servant,

(Signed)

“ JOHN CARTWRIGHT, Chairman.

Tooke's-Court, April 27, 1792.

“ To the President of the Society, entitled *The Friends of the People*,
 “ associated for the purpose of obtaining a Parliamentary Reform.”

William

William Baker, Esq. M. P. Chairman, reported from the Committee, the following answer, which they proposed to the adoption of the Society.

“ S I R,

“ Fully sensible that the Society for Constitutional Information have made no sacrifice to delicacy in their Address to us, we, on our part, shall affect no disguise. Voluntary Associations not being armed with public authority, have no force but that of truth, no hope of success, but in the strength of reason, and the concurrence of the public.

“ We profess not to entertain a wish, “ *that the great plans of public benefit, which Mr. Paine has so powerfully recommended, will speedily be carried into effect* *;” nor to amuse our fellow-citizens with the magnificent promise of obtaining for them the “ Rights † of the People in their full extent,” the indefinite language of delusion, which, by opening unbounded prospects of political adventure, tends to destroy that public opinion, which is the support of all Free Governments, and to excite a spirit of innovation, of which no wisdom can foresee the effects, and no skill direct the course. We view man as he is; the creature of habit as well as of reason. We think it therefore our bounden duty to propose no extreme changes, which, however specious in theory, can never be accomplished without violence to the settled opinions of mankind, nor attempted without endangering some of the most estimable advantages which we confessedly enjoy. We are convinced that the people bear a fixed attachment to the happy form of our Government, and the *genuine* principles of our Constitution. These we cherish as objects of just affection, not from any implicit reverence or habitual superstition, but as institutions best calculated to produce the happiness of man in Civil Society;—and it is because we are convinced that abuses are undermining and corrupting them, that we have associated for the preservation of those principles. We wish to *reform* the Constitution, because we wish to *preserve* it.

“ Associations formed in the face of Power, in opposition to the interests of our present Legislators, evince that *individual security*, and *personal independence*, are already established by our laws. The immense accumulation of debt, the

* For these exact words, see the Resolutions of the Manchester Society, published by the Society for Constitutional Information, in the Morning Chronicle of the 16th of April, 1792.

† The words of their Letter, signed J. CARTWRIGHT.

enormous taxation of seventeen millions of annual revenue, demonstrate that the *collective* interests of the community have been neglected or betrayed. We believe the defective Constitution of the Assembly intrusted with the public purse to be the real source of this evil. With this view we have pledged ourselves to attempt a timely and salutary Reform; adhering in every measure, we may take to the fundamental principles of the Constitution. According to those acknowledged principles, the People have a perfect right to possess an organ by which the public mind may speak in Legislation; and to bind their Representatives to the interests of the whole community, by a frequent renovation of the trust. These objects accomplished, we believe abuses will find no protection in a genuine Representation of the People; that regulations best adapted to the public happiness will be gradually infused into our laws, through the known channels of Legislation, and that the agitated minds of men, resuming their confidence in Parliament, will subside into a calm expectation of redress, without forgetting the principles, or violating the forms of the Constitution.

“ These, as we think, are the views of men detesting anarchy, yet sincere FRIENDS OF THE PEOPLE. Your letter appears to us to be written with a view to create distrust of our designs; to insinuate doubts of our sincerity, and to excite an early suspicion of our principles in the minds of the People. We have not, however, refused in answer to disclaim what we condemn, and to avow our real objects, from the pursuit of which, we will not suffer ourselves to be diverted by any controversy. We must beg leave at the same time to decline all future intercourse with a Society whose views and objects, as far as we can collect them from the various resolutions and proceedings which have been published, we cannot help regarding as irreconcilable with those real interests on which you profess to inform and enlighten the People.

“ Signed in name, and by order of the Society,

JOHN RUSSELL, CHAIRMAN.

“ Freemason's Tavern, May 12, 1792.

“ To JOHN CARTWRIGHT, Esq. Chairman of the Society for
“ Constitutional Information.”

RESOLVED,

RESOLVED, That the Society do approve and adopt the Answer proposed by the Committee to the Letter of the Society for Constitutional Information.

RESOLVED, That the proceedings of this day, including the Letter of the Society for Constitutional Information, and the Answer of this Society to it, be printed and published.

RESOLVED,

That together with the Answer of this Society to the Society for Constitutional Information, there be transmitted to John Cartwright, Esq. Chairman of that Society, a Copy of the Resolution of the Friends of the People, to print and publish the Letter and Reply.

By Order of the Meeting,

(Signed) **JOHN RUSSELL, CHAIRMAN.**

That together with the Answer of this Society to the Society for Constitutional Information, there be transmitted to John Cartwright, Esq. Chairman of that Society, a Copy of the Resolution of the Friends of the People, to print and publish the Letter and Reply.

WATKINS, LONDON.

Printed by J. W. Smith, at the Press of the Society.

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WATKINS, LONDON.